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Then: Reflection on the importance of Furman as it was

Yendelela Neely Holston '03

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**“IT WAS THE MOST FUN
I HAD IN 2016.”**



Whitener – wearing the coveted “Burt shirt” – and Reynolds at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival in New York City.

survival thriller “Deliverance” (1972), based on the same-titled novel by James Dickey.

And while Whitener will tell you she’s a rookie at the acting thing, truth be told, she dabbled in the craft at Furman. “I took one theater class – I think it was Theatre 101 – and loved it. It helped me connect with people who were like me and not like me. It gave me the confidence to do things I didn’t imagine I would do,” she says. Whitener also points to her work as a member of the Furman O-staff (orientation staff) where skits and general horsing around come with the territory.

On set, Whitener made fast friends with leading lady Ariel Winter. And Whitener had a special relationship with the leading man, whom she respectfully dubs “Mr. Reynolds.” “He was just as much a charmer as I’ve heard he was back then,” she says.

As for future roles, Whitener is happy with her day job as a marketing executive at The Whitener Group, the production company behind the movie, and where her father Gordon Whitener is chairman and CEO. But she’s ready for anything that may come her way now that she’s a card-carrying member of the Screen Actors Guild. ●



THEN

*Reflection on the importance of
Furman as it was*

I will never forget entering the front gates of Furman for the first time. It was in April 1998, and Furman was my first college visit. While I did not visit nearly as many colleges as students do today, I did visit enough to know that Furman was special. The way the sun hit the leaves on the trees lining the entrance created an enchanting scene. I felt as if I was entering a magical place. And I was right.

However, the magic of Furman is not just in the majesty of the campus (which still takes my breath away). You feel a difference when you enter “the Furman bubble.” And it’s a difference I have not experienced anywhere since.

While a student, I was exposed to more people and cultures than I could have ever imagined I would at this small school in Greenville, South Carolina. I learned about the history and politics of Southern Africa as I traveled South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland and Namibia with professors Don Gordon and Erik Ching.

And I learned so much more within Furman’s gates. I learned the history of India and Pakistan from a Pakistani-American classmate who also introduced me to Ramadan and a deeper understanding of Islam, an understanding that I was particularly aware of as this classmate and I watched the collapse of the second tower in

the political science department common area on the morning of September 11, 2001. A classmate of Palestinian descent with the most analytical mind I have ever met gave me my first perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And I, the descendent of slaves, would frequently sit in the student center to discuss life (and occasionally the history of the American South) with a friend and descendent of a proud Confederate family.

These interactions are how I remember Furman: a place where differing perspectives converge and where open and honest dialogue can result if you are receptive to it. At Furman, I gained a great appreciation for differing viewpoints. I learned how to separate people from their beliefs in this beautiful place where people from all backgrounds come together to live and learn from each other. That was the magic that Furman showed me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yendelela Neely Holston ’03 is partner and chief diversity & inclusion officer at Kilpatrick Townsend. A member of the Furman Board of Trustees, Holston received the Corporate Counsel Community Champion Award in May.